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'Smart' ID cards set to be issued

By Chris Barron
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The Common Access Card will help make the lives of cardholders much easier, defense officials say.

The Navy is getting smarter.

And it all has to do with a card that can fit inside any wallet.

The Department of Defense is beginning to issue new "smart" identification cards to about four million active duty members, selected reserves and civilian and eligible contractor employees.

Approximately 84,000 Common Access Cards have already been issued on a trial basis at military installations around the world.

More than 30,000 are scheduled to be issued for those working at Puget Sound naval installations. A mass issuance of the ID cards — which cost the government about \$8 each — will begin in January, although the Navy has until November 2002 to complete the process.

"It's a great idea and down the road will be a useful tool," said Lt. Mike Bruce, officer in charge of personnel support detachment at Naval Submarine Base Bangor. "It'll be pretty amazing once we start using them (to their full capacity)."

For now, the smart cards, which will sport a completely different look than the current green ID cards, will just be used for identification.

However, once the Navy and Marine Corps Internet goes online late next year, the cards can be used to access secure defense Web sites and digitally encrypt and sign e-mail.

The smart card includes a bar code, a circuit chip and a magnetic stripe and is designed to make the cardholder's life more simple. The information on the card includes:

- Bar code: Name, social security number, date of birth, personnel category, pay category, organizational affiliation and pay grade.
- Circuit chip: Gender, benefits and privileges information, blood type and digital certificates.
- Magnetic stripe: Primarily for building and computer access information.

The cards will help solve "the hurry up and wait" syndrome in the military, John P. Stendit, the Pentagon's chief information officer, told The Associated Press.

In addition, the smart cards will add another level of security to computers and secure access areas and doors. The capability of the cards may eventually grow to include funding for official travel, use of automatic teller machines, commissary purchases and weapons issues.

And in the case of an event such as the Sept. 11 terrorist attack on the Pentagon, officials would know who got out of the building and who is still inside.

For now, the challenge for those involved is the simple issuance of the cards, which has proved anything but simple.

When the military began issuing the cards, it took as long as 20 minutes per person. As experience grew, however, the time got shorter, Bruce said.

Each person issued a new ID card will need to have a digital picture taken, provide one fingerprint and choose a personal identification number.

"We've gotten it between 10 and 12 minutes, which is good," he said. "It was difficult at first. Any time you implement a new system, glitches are going to happen. But we went through the nightmare and headache and are doing well now."

The largest card issuance challenge at West Sound installations will be at Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, where a civilian work force of nearly 8,200 will receive their new ID cards next year.

An Internet-equipped van with five or six stations will be used to help speed the process along, Bruce said.

Most of the card issuance outside the shipyard will be broken down by command. And each will set up a time for their employees to go through the process.

Traditional color-coded ID cards will continue to be issued to family members, retirees, disabled veterans and inactive ready reserve and National Guard.

Here's more:

For answers to specific questions regarding the "smart" identification card, go to www.dmdc.osd.mil/smartcard.

You must be a Department of Defense employee to access the Web site.